

THE PRICE OF AN ABBEYDALE SCYTHER

by Bronwen Barber

For a trade-secret formula he'd never share,
the charge of the pots and in charge of the task:

Head Melter's stress

For raking out coals between running for beer,
days underground amid cool draughts and ash:

Cellar Lad's cough

For treading clay barefoot for hours each day
to pound out the bubbles that'd burst as they baked:

Pot Maker's leg strain

For strong arms in the sparks and an eye on the flame,
lifting up pots and skimming off muck:

Puller Out's pock-marked skin

For deftly decanting the fires of Hell,
sack-apron steaming in heat that boiled blood:

Teemer's bronchitis

For melding a sandwich of iron and steel,
forging crown scythes with a sharp, rhythmic thud:

Hammer Man's crushed fingers

For whetting the tools as the stone flicked up dust,
giving the edge to these Sheffield-made blades:

Grinder's lung disease

For black-paint protection, straw-rope wrapping last,
stainless and peerless, packed tight into crates:

Finisher's sliced fingertips

For the shaking of hands on those lucrative sales
wrought from the grind of a working man's graft:

Manager's death threats

For smelting a trade from the rivers and hills,
honing repute for industrial craft:

Made in Sheffield